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SUBJECT: YOUR UPCOMING VISIT TO SLOVENIA: AN OPPORTUNITY TO
ENGAGE ON AFGHANISTAN AND CROATIA

¶1. (SBU/NF) Thank you for agreeing to a bilateral program on the margins of the NATO Strategic Concept Seminar in Brdo. Your visit could not have come at a better time. Slovenia is in the midst of an internal debate over its future role in ISAF, and the political class could badly use some additional resolve. Slovenia has two platoons (81 soldiers) deployed with the Italians in Herat on a tightly-caveated force protection mission. The U.S. and NATO would like them to deploy an OMLT and lift caveats so Slovenian soldiers could train the ANA in the field. The Colorado National Guard is standing by to train and partner with Slovenia for the first year. Defense Minister Jelusic is a strong proponent of this approach, and she is supported by Foreign Minister Zbogar. However, doubts run deep among some members of the center-left coalition government, and Prime Minister Pahor tends toward split-the-difference solutions.

¶2. (SBU/NF) Under these circumstances, lifting caveats is likely to be the more-difficult decision. Slovenia has not suffered a single casualty in Afghanistan. Perhaps because of this, politicians live in fear of the impact the first body bag would have on this close-knit society. Add to this a steady drumbeat of negative reporting from a news media that does not seem to have caught up with the fact that Slovenia is no longer part of the Non-Aligned Movement, as well the failure of successive governments to explain adequately what Slovenian "peacekeepers" are doing in Afghanistan, and you are left with decidedly shallow public support for the mission.

¶3. (SBU/NF) You can help by publicly articulating the reasons ISAF is in Afghanistan, but your most important audience may consist of one man: President Danilo Turk. Turk, whom you know from your days in New York when he was the Slovenian Permrep and later ASG, is widely respected by Slovenians. As opinion-leader-in-chief, his support for ISAF is critical, yet he is widely seen as harboring doubts. In the opening days of the domestic debate, he spoke of the need for an "exit strategy" and expressed the view that Slovenia's contribution should be primarily humanitarian. Yet I do not think his mind is made up, and I look to you and Secretary General Rasmussen to frame the issue over lunch in a way that will resonate to this committed internationalist. If your schedule permits, we would also like you to give a short interview to one of the leading Slovenian dailies, focused primarily on "why ISAF is in Afghanistan." Slovenians trust and respect you because of your roots in Central Europe and your principled stand on the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia.

¶4. (SBU/NF) Prime Minister Pahor also needs to hear your message about Afghanistan, in part because his attention has been monopolized recently by developments in Slovenia's relations with Croatia. Last December, Slovenia began blocking Croatia's EU accession talks in an effort to force

Croatia to address the disputed (primarily maritime) border between the two countries. This was followed by a series of bitter recriminations and displays of bad faith on both sides, mediation by EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn, the resignation of Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader, and, finally, the signing of an arbitration agreement by Pahor and Croatian PM Jadranka Kosor on November 4. Both leaders face bruising ratification battles in their respective parliaments before they can claim victory. In an effort to preempt the opposition, Slovenia will also hold a referendum on the agreement.

15. (SBU) Though he walked back from his earlier promise to resign if the referendum fails, Pahor has clearly staked his political future on the successful ratification of the arbitration agreement. The U.S. supported Slovenia and Croatia as they sought to overcome disagreements over key articles of the Rehn proposal, while consistently pointing out that we did not believe bilateral disputes should be used to block the process of EU enlargement. You should congratulate Pahor on his achievement, offer continuing strong U.S. support to both sides as they move toward ratification and implementation, and encourage Turk to continue speaking out in support of the agreement.

16. (SBU) Publicly, you should avoid doing more than reiterating the State Department spokesman's message of congratulations and U.S. support for the agreement; too high an American profile could fuel the perception among some sectors of the public that arbitration the agreement was "forced" on Slovenia by outsiders. However, Turk may be the best judge of what message will best resonate coming from you, so you may want to consult him at lunch, given that the

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question could come up in your press availability. Anything you say will be listened to closely on both sides of the border.

17. (SBU/NF) The biggest obstacle facing the agreement on the Slovenian side is the leader of the largest opposition party, former Prime Minister Janez Jansa. You will not meet Jansa while you are here, but if the subject comes up in your discussion of the Western Balkans, you may want to encourage other Allied governments -- particularly those led by conservative politicians with whom Jansa may have personal ties -- to weigh in with him in support of the agreement, as we are doing. If any members of the U.S. delegation know Jansa and would be willing to meet with him or former Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel on November 12, we would welcome the opportunity to arrange such a meeting.

18. (U) Your briefing papers will address some of these issues in greater detail, and I look forward to briefing you personally upon your arrival. I would also note in closing that former President Clinton met with Turk and Pahor when he was here a little more than a week ago for a privately-funded lecture.

FREDEN